

Tante Johanne: Letters of a Danish Immigrant Family, 1887-1910

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1998 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Tante Johanne: Letters of a Danish Immigrant Family, 1887-1910." *The Annals of Iowa* 57 (1998), 191-192.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10174>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Book Notices

Brackett's Battalion, Minnesota Cavalry, 1861-1866, by Kurt D. Bergemann. Minneapolis: Adeniram Publications, 1996. ix, 145 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$12.99 paper.

REVIEWED BY JOHN Y. SIMON, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY AT CARBONDALE

Three companies of Minnesota volunteer cavalry, sent to St. Louis in 1861, joined the Curtis Horse, a regiment named in honor of Iowan Samuel R. Curtis, the departmental commander. Comprising soldiers from Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska Territory, and commanded by another Iowan, William W. Lowe, the regiment was renamed the Fifth Iowa in June 1862, despite complaints from Minnesotans. This regiment, roughriding and ill disciplined, served effectively in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. In February 1864, the Minnesota cavalymen returned home to serve officially as Brackett's Battalion in the campaigns against the Sioux in Dakota Territory. A narrative of these operations provides about half of the text. Like other Civil War units, this battalion contained a surprisingly large proportion of men who kept diaries, wrote to hometown newspapers, or penned reminiscences after the war.

Kurt D. Bergemann, the great-great-grandson of a member of Brackett's Battalion and an assiduous researcher, has published an attractive and detailed history of his ancestor's unit. He has amassed material from manuscripts and newspapers as well as books. He has also assembled attractive illustrations. The publication would have profited from footnotes and an index, to say nothing of a competent copyeditor, but readers will appreciate this labor of love.

Tante Johanne: Letters of a Danish Immigrant Family, 1887-1910, edited by John W. Nielsen. Blair, NE: Lur Publications, Danish Immigrant Archive, 1996. xiv, 118 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$12.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA LUND-JONES, THE DANISH IMMIGRANT MUSEUM

Tante Johanne is the first published compilation to be taken from the remarkable Hansen-Mengers Collection, an extensive holding of immigrant family correspondence housed at the Danish Immigrant Archive

at Dana College. The correspondence that is made available in this volume focuses primarily on an exchange between Johanne Nielsen (Tante Johanne) and her nephew, Christian Mengers, and dates from 1887, the year of his immigration to America.

Johanne Nielsen, her husband, and their three young daughters emigrated from Denmark in the early 1870s. In the mid-1880s, the Nielsens, by then a family of eleven, relocated from Streator, Illinois, to a farm near Algona, Iowa. Johanne's loneliness in America, her longing for a Danish community of worship, and her sense of spiritual isolation find natural expression in her letters to her nephew, who was a Danish Lutheran minister in the United States. Interwoven with this primary exchange, and very much a part of this immigrant family's ongoing communication, are letters from Johanne's daughters and from Christian's father and brothers. Their voices add range and depth to the volume.

The editorial commentaries that preface each letter firmly situate the exchanges within their larger historical context. The Iowa farm and the town of Algona figure as muted background in Johanne's letters. Her older daughters taught in rural schools. Their training and experiences contribute some of the more vivid "lived" moments to the correspondence.

Johanne Nielsen never really adjusted to her life in America. Those involved in immigration studies will find this book of particular interest.

Many Danes, Some Norwegians: Karen Miller's Diary, 1894, edited by John W. Nielsen, translated by Ninna Engskow. Blair, NE: Lur Publications, Danish Immigrant Archive, 1996. xviii, 173 pp. Illustrations, index. \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY KRISTIN ELMQUIST, SWISHER, IOWA

For reasons unknown, Karen Miller, a Danish immigrant farm woman, kept a diary in 1894, the year before her death at age 55. In it she describes in tremendous detail farm life in Elko, Minnesota. The editor introduces each month with an informative, contextualizing comment. The text contains both the original Danish and the English translation, capturing the particular language of this immigrant community. Mingled with news of the farm and her family are religious sentiments and hymns. Miller comments on the primary events in her life—the activities she and her family did that day, the

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.